

**A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT
TO DIVORCE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
MODIFICATION OF THE COURT PROCESS**

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT
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A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO
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COURT PROCESS

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This study examined thirty-seven elementary and secondary school students' adjustment to divorce through a self-administered questionnaire, and through a review of student records of attendance, grades, and behavior.

Measurements of adjustment were based on an adjustment scale permitting a maximum of twenty-five points. The ratings were categorized as poor (7-13), moderate (14-18), and good (19-22). Psychosocial factors were examined by comparing them statistically to the adjustment score received on the adjustment scale: (1) age; (2) sex; (3) grade in school; (4) number of siblings in the home; (5) visitation

arrangements; (6) number of friendships; (7) pre and post divorce counseling; (8) perceived relationship between parents; (9) participation in the court process; (10) with whom the child resides; and (11) length of time since the divorce.

Statistical analyses were used on each of the eleven psychosocial factors and no significant differences were found in their relationship to children's adjustment to divorce. While no statistically significant difference was found regarding adjustment to divorce the data indicated a higher adjustment relationship between subjects who visited with the non-custodial parent at least once per month; were less involved with the court process; reside with their father; had a longer time since the divorce; perceived a cooperative relationship between parents; had pre-divorce counseling; and had close friends. Boys showed a lower adjustment score than girls.

Those areas of higher relationship scores to adjustment could be considered significant factors when looking at the court process for handling divorce cases.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The disruption of the family by divorce and/or separation is impacting the stability of the family and the family's traditional socialization practices in this nation at a rapid rate (Wolchik and Karoly, 1988). Children, in particular, are impacted by the divorce of their parents. The developmental cycle of the child is disrupted socially, emotionally, and physically. As a result of this disruption in the development cycle, the child is confronted with his adjustment to the reorganization and changes within the family system (Wolchik and Karoly, 1988).

The collection of statistical information regarding marriage and divorce was started in 1867 - 1886 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989). Statistics from the United States Census Bureau indicate that the number of marriages/divorces in the United States were as follows:

YEAR	MARRIAGES	DIVORCES
1960	1,523,000	393,000
1970	2,159,000	708,000
1980	2,390,300	1,189,000
1985	2,413,000	1,190,000 (estimated)
1987	2,421,000	1,157,000 (estimated)

Although there has been an increase in divorce rates over a 17 year period, factors such as age at marriage, political and economic conditions, and geographic differences influence the rates (Price, 1988). Specifically, the age of marriage factor is that younger married women tend to have higher divorce rates than older married women (Price, 1988). The political and economic conditions can be related to divorce rate patterns; i.e. during societal turmoil like war, divorce rates increase. Brief courtships before marriage may contribute to an increase in divorce rates (Price, 1988). The urban centers have higher divorce rates than rural areas. The rural areas are more homogeneous communities whereas urban centers are more heterogeneous (Price, 1988). The divorce rates are part of a trend over a 100 year period, which takes into consideration the periods of industrialization and urbanization (Price, 1988).

The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1989) reported the number of children involved in divorce as follows:

YEAR	CHILDREN
1970	870,000
1980	1,174,000
1985	1,091,000

With the number of children involved in divorce situations, it is important to see how the legal system considers, handles, and affects children experiencing divorce and how children are adjusting to the divorce.

The majority of divorce cases are handled in an adversarial court proceeding. The adversarial court proceeding is one having opposite parties, whereby, one party is seeking relief and one party is contesting it (Black's Law Dictionary, 1979). The adversarial system assumes that the task is to present a case for each party without objectively seeking a solution which is in the best interest of children (Wilkinson, 1981). The adversarial court process operates to perpetuate conflict and strengthen barriers between the parties (Wilkinson, 1981). The child is victimized by the system psychologically, emotionally and socially during the dissolution of the marriage process. Thus, the child may experience a variety of problems associated with the divorce. Such problems are likely to show up in the school setting.

The area of concern which will be addressed in this research will be the psychsocial adjustment of children to divorce, and whether the adversarial

court process influences the adjustment of children to divorce.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a factor which fosters harshness associated with divorce - the court process. Divorce cases are traditionally handled by courts in an adversarial manner. That is the legal system has a process by which divorce cases are handled. They are handled by one party petitioning the court for divorce; and the other party has the right to oppose or contest that petition. This contest is resolved by the judge in a court of law.

The majority of states, including Georgia, hear the petition and issue a final decree for divorce based on information contained in the petition and settlement agreement. This information includes property settlements, child custody, support payments, and visitation arrangements. To resolve these settlement issues in the courts the attorney for each party argues for his/her client's interests. Most often an atmosphere of resentment and hostility between the husband and wife occurs, creating a battleground where everyone has the potential to lose, especially the children. The judge looks at all the arguments presented by each party concerning the children. Using the "best interest of the child"

test, he may consider evidence about the children from other sources; i.e. mental health professionals, school records, and relatives. The judge may also talk with the children concerning their wishes. Based upon all the information the judge makes a decision about where the children should live, about visitation, and about child support.

In the United States, several states have recognized the impact of divorce on children and have looked at alternatives to the adversarial process. Some states use mediation processes and some have a family court system to assist families and the court system in making appropriate and reasonable decisions about divorce issues. These court systems include in their process counseling services for the family. This process is based on an interdisciplinary approach to handling family issues. This approach is one whereby several professions, i.e., social work, legal, and mental health, work cooperatively toward addressing family issues before the court.

It is important to look at the significance of alternatives to the traditional court process in the handling of divorce cases. As children see, hear, and feel the tension and growing division between their

parents as divorce occurs, the court system needs to acknowledge, begin to understand, and respond to the effects of divorce on children. Adjustment problems children experience as a result of their parents' divorce frequently surface first at school. Such adjustments may include changes in attendance, grades, behavior, and friendships.

This study will look at the following variables that could affect children's adjustment to divorce: 1) age; 2) sex; 3) grade in school; 4) length of time since divorce; 5) number of siblings in the home; 6) visitation arrangements; 7) number of friendships; 8) pre and post divorce counseling; 9) relationship between parents; (10) child's participation in court proceedings; (11) who child resides with.

The questions to be addressed in this study are:

- 1) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her age?
- 2) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her sex?
- 3) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and with

whom he/she lives?

- 4) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and the length of time since the divorce?
- 5) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her number of siblings in the home?
- 6) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her visitation arrangements with the non-custodial parent?
- 7) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her number of friendships?
- 8) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her family's involvement in pre and/or post divorce counseling?
- 9) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her parents' relationship?
- 10) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her involvement in the court process?

11) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her grade in school?

12) What is the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her perception of the parents' feelings about the divorce?

SIGNIFICANCE/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As children experience disorganization, confusion, and sometimes dislocation as a result of divorce it is important to look at their adjustment to the divorce and the role of the Court in this process. Divorce does create a change in the family system; therefore, children do experience change. A social worker in a school setting can readily ascertain that children in divorce situations experience adjustment concerns. Although, all children make that adjustment differently, adjustment does occur when a disruption in the family system emerges.

It is important that the legal process of divorce, where children are involved, focus on "the best interest of the child" in a manner that permits the best possible adjustment. An interdisciplinary approach to handling divorce cases in the court process could address children's adjustment issues and examine strategies for dealing with these issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin a discussion on the topic of divorce and children's adjustment to it, it is important to review certain aspects of divorce historically. The development of divorce laws in America, the view of divorce through the years, and the changes in women's and children's roles in society are relevant to understanding today's views on divorce.

Early American settlers were influenced by the authority of the Church of England. They resisted divorce and supported a stable family life. The courts sanctioned divorce for a few reasons, including desertion, adultery, and impotence (Wilkinson, 1981). The ideas of guilt and fault were also instituted and those ideas are in divorce laws today. Women and children had no legal rights due to their identification in the law as property of the husband/father (Irving, 1981).

During the Colonial era there was a gradual modification of divorce prohibitions. Legal separations and annulments became common (Price, 1988). By the eighteenth century, however, there was greater opportunity to leave marriages where people were unhappy; thus, there was an increase in divorce.

With industrialization, the conjugal family emerged during the nineteenth century. The Church continued to maintain control over marriage and divorce but permitted divorce when one spouse was found guilty of an offense against the other (Price, 1988). In 1857, the civil courts took control over divorce matters (Wilkinson, 1981). Women during this time gained independence and a sense of importance and dignity. These beliefs came as women were employed outside the home. Women no longer felt a need to remain in an unsatisfying marital relationship. The importance of childhood and the needs of children became important in society during this time (Price, 1988). During the early twentieth century, the courts began to use the concept in the "best interests of the child". Unless proven unfit, the mother was viewed as the person to provide for the needs of the child. In 1924, the doctrine "best interests of the child" included freedom for the courts to decide the custodian of the child (Wilkinson, 1981). The divorce rate was low during the 1930's, but began to increase between 1940 and 1946. The number of divorces rose from 264,000 to 610,000 per year during that time (The World Almanac, 1989; Price, 1988). In the 1970's, the

divorce rate rose as social changes occurred; i.e. increase of women in the work force, and alternatives to marriage (Price, 1988).

Divorce laws changed in 1970. The fault factor of divorce was changed to include no-fault reasons for divorce. No-fault divorce maintains that marriages should be terminated without any finding of guilt on the part of either spouse (Wilkinson, 1981). The no-fault change decreased the adversarial nature of the divorce process. However, the existence of the no-fault statute does not prevent people from fighting over issues. There has been an increase in custody disputes which still use a fault basis (Irving, 1981). The changes in societal views about divorce and in the legal concepts regarding divorce have gradually included the importance of children's rights, their development, and their needs. The trauma of divorce remains for families and their children, even though easier divorce processes have emerged (Wilkinson, 1981).

The adversarial nature of the divorce process begins with the filing of a petition by one party. It ends by the judge issuing a final decree granting the divorce. The process from beginning to end includes

the attorneys for their respective client's arguing on the client's behalf. Included in these arguments are division of property matters, child custody issues, and support. In Georgia, the Superior Court is the court holding jurisdiction over the case of divorce.

In Georgia, the court has the sole discretion to determine the custody of a child under the age of 14. The judge makes a custody decision based on the "best interests of the child" and on what will promote the child's welfare and happiness (O.C.G.A. 19-9-3). This has been and continues to be the process by which the majority of courts handle divorce cases.

An alternative to the traditional court process in divorce cases began in 1960. A movement toward family courts started. These courts were to be staffed with interested and specially qualified judges, social workers, and other professionals; and would be subject to less adversary rules of procedure. They would provide professional help and be more than an unconcerned forum to settle disputes (Krause, 1984). New York is one of few states which established a family court. The family court of New York has an intake process. The objective at this level is to lead the parties to a resolution of their

differences or to accept referrals for marriage counseling ("Tactics", 1970).

A part of the family court in New York is the psychiatric and psychological clinic. The reports from the doctors at the clinic may not be binding on the court but are considered by the court. The doctors assist in resolving and ameliorating family problems. When a judge makes a decision it is based on a dual role. One role is that of arbiter of the law, that is, applying the law while protecting the rights of all parties. The other role is one of mediator, conciliator, and guardian of the welfare of children ("Tactics", 1970).

Children of divorce studies have primarily been conducted on preschoolers and elementary school children (Kaslow, 1987). Kaslow (1987) reported on work by Dorfman, wherein Dorfman prepared a table to relate the child's age to behavior showing distress that is likely to be exhibited during separation and divorce. The table indicates that children ages 0-12 months become fussy, and irritable due to the mother's upset. Due to mother's depression the child may become unresponsive. Children ages 1-2 months, need and are attached to their mothers. Children, whose

mothers are depressed, may cling and whine because their mothers do not want to play with them. Separation makes toddlers fearful of losing their mothers and of new things. There is bedtime screaming which is normal; but, may be persistent or severe after the separation. For ages 3,4 and 5, the child often regresses under stress. The child may wet the bed or use babytalk. He/she may become possessive or overly neat in order to keep some order. Preschoolers believe that they are central to all that goes on in the world. They may blame themselves for the separation, often trying to correct the situation. The child may become overly aggressive which is often a sign of a child's deeply felt anger over the separation. Children ages 6,7,8, and 9 may show a drop in grades due to fantasies about reconciliation, memories, intense sadness, anger and worry. Economics and the emotional needs of mothers often force the children to take on extra responsibilities. Parents competing for the child's loyalty fall prey to the manipulation of their children for gifts and privileges. Children ages 10, 11, and 12 may seem too grownup. At this age, children feel especially betrayed and angry at one or both parents and may be

very vocal. They punish and seek revenge often aligning themselves with one parent against the other.

Several studies have been conducted to look at the responses of children to divorce. Such studies will be discussed to gain insight into this writer's proposed study.

In a study conducted by MacKinnon (1988), the relation between family processes and sibling relations was explored. Ninety-six pairs of siblings were observed in a laboratory setting. Mothers were given the Family History Inventory to measure relationships within the home. The results of the study concluded that the quality of other relationships in the family are important predictors of sibling interaction, regardless of the family form.

A study by Kurdek and Berg (1987) explored children's beliefs about parental divorce. The 36 item Children's Beliefs About Parental Separation Scale was administered to 170 children. Findings indicated that children living without their fathers had more parental blame beliefs than children living with their fathers. These findings create concern because this blame may interfere with the establishment and maintenance of regular

nonconflictual visitation by the father. The study found that children with problematic beliefs about their parent's divorce were anxious, had low self-concepts in the area of parent relations, and reported little social support.

Demo and Acock (1988) cited a number of studies dealing with the impact of divorce on children in their review of the literature.

Hess and Camera (1979) found that children in divorced families experienced greater stress. The study found that children from divorced families were less productive in schoolwork. School records and teacher ratings were used to measure productivity. Behavior checklists were completed by parents to measure stress. The sample for the study was 32 white boys and girls, ages 9-11.

Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1979) found that play patterns of boys and girls from divorced families were less socially and cognitively mature immediately following divorce. The children were less happy, more anxious and the effects of their parents' divorce were longer lasting for boys. Observational measures of children's free play and social interaction, teacher ratings of behavior, and peer measures were used to

gather data for the study. The study included 48 white boys and 48 white girls, ages 3.9-5.8.

Guilubaldi and Perry (1985) found that boys in divorced families had a greater frequency of maladaptive symptoms, inappropriate behavior, and unhappiness. Among girls there was a greater sense of responsibility for what happened to them. Boys from divorced families had greater contact with friends than boys in intact families. Parent and teacher rating scales were administered and child interviews were used on 365 boys and 334 girls.

Wallerstein (1983) identified six psychological tasks children of divorce must master. First, is the acknowledgement of the reality of the marital separation which involves fears of abandonment and/or ego regression. Second, is the disengagement from the parental conflict so that customary pursuits like school and sports can be resumed. Third, the child deals with the resolution of loss. Fourth, the child deals with the resolution of anger and self-blame. Fifth, the child accepts the permanence of the divorce, which tends to be easier for older than younger children. Sixth, the child achieves a realistic hope of one's own future relationships.

In 1985, Rater et al. found that among 3rd grade girls from divorce families there was a significantly lower perceived competence. There was no difference seen among 6th grade girls. The study was on 40 third and sixth grade girls.

Kalter (1985) found that girls from divorced families committed more delinquent acts like drug use and skipping school. The study included 62 girls from divorced parents and 460 girls from intact households.

In a study by Wyman et al. (1985) findings concluded that children of divorced parents had fewer close friends, spent less time with friends, and participated in fewer activities. However, the study showed no significant differences in perceived social competence, physical competence, or general self-esteem. The group did show lower perceived cognitive competence. The measure used was a parent questionnaire about children's sources of social support. The sample included 98 children with divorced parents and 170 from intact families and all children were in grades four through six.

A study by Stolberg and Anker (1986) found that a group of children from divorced families were significantly less pro-social in school-related

behaviors. The subjects for the study were 42 males and 37 females ages 6-16; and they were measured on three social competence scales.

Kinard and Reinberg (1986) studied 78 girls and 72 boys in fourth grade and found that children in recently disrupted families had significantly lower scores on language, total achievement, and productivity. A study by Kinard and Reinberg (1984), of 202 boys and 192 girls in third grade, found that children in recently disrupted families had significantly more problems with attention in school.

The previous studies cited do not include a look at pre and post divorce counseling. The studies do not look at the need for modification of the adversarial court process in the management of family issues and children's reactions about divorce. All studies reported do indicate that children are effected by their parents' divorce; by their perceptions of the parents' relationship; by their visitation with the non-custodial parent; by their school performance; by their behavior; and by their school attendance. The studies further indicate a difference in children's reactions to divorce based on age and sex of the children.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The psychosocial approach is one which focuses on a dual and integrated understanding of the psychological and sociological man. (Turner, 1979).

Originally, the psychosocial term was generic to the social work profession, however, it had developed into a specific approach to social work practice. The approach includes a knowledge base of biological, psychological, and social components of human growth and development and the interaction of these three components. (Turner, 1979). Hollis and Woods (1981) referred to Gordon Hamilton's term "the-person-in-his-situation" as the understanding of the interrelatedness of the interaction of man with his systems, i.e., biological, psychological, and social. From a sound knowledge base, and an understanding of the application of the psychosocial approach the development of skills for practice emerge. Therefore, the psychosocial approach to social work practice is committed to a continuing search for understanding of the person in relationship to the environment in order to help the person achieve his/her potential. (Turner, 1979).

A person reaches his/her potential through

interaction with systems in the environment, i.e., family, friends, school, and community. It follows that a child is influenced by relationships and interactions in his/her life. When a change occurs in one or more facets of the child's life, all other systems are effected. A thorough understanding of the dynamics of the needs of children and the interactions between children and their environments will enable social work practitioners to utilize the psychosocial approach in working with children from divorced parents.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

ADVERSARY PROCEEDING - "one having opposing parties; contested. One of which the party seeking relief has given notice to the other party, and afforded the latter an opportunity to contest it." (Black's Law Dictionary, 1979,p.49)

FAMILY COURT - "Such courts exist in several states. Typically this court will have jurisdiction over: (1) child abuse and neglect proceedings, (2) support proceedings, (3) proceedings to determine paternity and for support of children born out of wedlock, (4) proceedings to terminate custody by reason of permanent neglect, (5) proceedings concerning juvenile delinquency, (6) family offenses proceedings." (Black's Law Dictionary, 1979,p.544)

FINAL DECREE - for this study the final decree means the order entered by the court dissolving the marital relationship.

PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH - "the need to understand individuals as such and as people in interaction with the complexities of their environments." (Encyclopedia of Social Work 1987)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

HYPOTHESES

In this study of the adjustment of children to divorce and the implications for modification of the court process, the following hypotheses were considered:

- 1) There will be no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her age.
- 2) There will be no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her sex.
- 3) There will be no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and with whom he/she lives.
- 4) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and the length of time since the divorce.
- 5) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her number of siblings in the home.
- 6) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her

visitation arrangements with the non-custodial parent.

7) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her number of friendships.

8) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her family's involvement in pre and/or post divorce counseling.

9) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and the child's perception of his/her parents' relationship.

10) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and his/her involvement in the court process.

11) There is no relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and whether he/she was elementary school age or high school age.

DESIGN OF STUDY

A descriptive study was used to examine the adjustment of selected children to their parents' divorce. The study included use of a nineteen item questionnaire, developed by this researcher, which included demographic information, i.e., family composition, grade in school, age, and sex. Other

questions included responses to the child's feelings and perceptions about his/her parents' divorce.

This researcher gathered data from school records regarding each subject's attendance, behavior, and academic performance. An adjustment scale was constructed from utilization of selected variables from the questionnaire and school records. The adjustment scale was used to rate the adjustment to divorce of each subject. Each subject had the possibility of accumulating a total score of twenty-five points on the scale. Ratings on the scale were grouped into three levels: (1) poor (7-13 points); (2) moderate (14-18 points); and (3) good (19-22 points).

Items on the adjustment scale ranged from number of friends, number of discipline referrals in school, difficulty with classwork, attendance, grade point average, to a child's feelings about the divorce of his/her parents.

SAMPLING

The subjects (N=37) were selected from a student population of 2400 students from one high school, and from three elementary schools. Seventy-five students were identified by teachers, counselors, and

administrators based on their knowledge of those students from divorced families. Those subjects whose parents gave permission for participation within this researcher's time frame were selected for the study.

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaires were administered by the researcher in small groups at each school during fifty minute intervals. A numbered sign-in sheet was signed by each subject, and that number corresponded to a number on the questionnaire. The researcher pulled student records by use of assigned numbers of the subjects. School attendance, behavior and grades were gathered from student records, of the subjects, and recorded on a numbered form which corresponded to the numbered questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical tests done on each hypothesis included Pearson Product Moment Test, Analysis of Variance Test, and t-tests.

Pearson Product Moment Tests were done on the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and the number of friendships. The Analysis of Variance Test was done on the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured

by school variables and with whom the child resides. t-tests were run on the relationship between a child's adjustment as measured by school variables and the sex of the child, the age of the child, the length of time since the parents divorced, the number of siblings in the home, the visitation arrangements, pre and post divorce counseling, the child's perception of the parents' relationship, the child's grade in school, and the child's involvement in the court process.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The population studied included 37 students from three elementary schools and from one high school in DeKalb County, Georgia. From the elementary schools there were a total of eight boys and eleven girls in the study, and from the high school there were a total of seven boys and eleven girls in the study.

Of the 37 subjects 32.4% related poor adjustment scores ranging from 7 to 13 points. Thirty-five point two percent scored in the moderate range with scores of 14 to 18 points. Thirty-two point four percent fell in the good range of adjustment with scores of 19 to 24 points. The distribution of scores on adjustment shown in Table 1 indicates that boys had lower adjustment scores than females. Particularly among elementary age boys. Seventy-five percent of the elementary age boys scored poor adjustment, 12.5% scored moderate adjustment, 12.5% scored good adjustment. Among the high school age boys, 43% scored poor adjustment, 43% scored good adjustment, and 14% scored moderate. Of the elementary age girls 9% scored poor on the adjustment scale. Forty-five point five percent scored moderate, and 45.5% scored

good. Of the high school girls 27% scored good adjustment, 18% scored poor, and 55% scored moderate.

Table 1.

Distribution on Adjustment Scale by Age and Sex

Subjects	poor(7-13)	moderate(14-18)	good(19-22)
<hr/>			
Male			
age 8-13	6	1	1
age 14-19	3	1	3
Female			
age 8-13	1	5	5
age 14-19	2	6	3

Among high school age children there was a higher mean adjustment score than among elementary age children. However, there was no significant relationship between adjustment of the child and grade in school of the child. (See Table 2).

Among boys ages 8-13 the adjustment scores were poor; however, among females ages 8-13 adjustment scores were higher. There was no statistically significant difference in adjustment among males and females in the population. (See Table 2).

Table 2
Adjustment Scores by Grade Level

	N	Mean \bar{x}	SD	t
Grade				-0.86
elementary	19	14.95	4.89	
high	18	16.22	4.11	
Sex				
male	15	13.47	4.78	-2.50
female	22	17.00	3.79	.05

$p < .05$

On the relationship between adjustment to divorce and the child's involvement with the court process there was no significant difference among children who participated in the court process and those who did not participate. However, those children who had talked to the judge or with an attorney showed lower adjustment ratings than those who had no involvement with the court process. (See Table 3).

No significant difference was shown in the relationship between the time since the parents' divorce and the children's adjustment to the divorce. Those children in the group of more than two years

since their parents' divorce scored higher on the adjustment rating. In the two years or less group, 55% were girls and 45% were boys. All girls were elementary age; however, the boys were both elementary age and high school age. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Adjustment by Involvement in the Court Process and
by Time Since Divorce

	N	Mean \bar{x}	SD	<u>t</u>
Involvement				.36
in court process	31	15.87	4.27	
did nothing				
talked to judge/attorney	6	14.00	5.80	
Time since divorce				-1.05
2 or less years	11	14.55	4.59	
more than 2 years	25	16.24	4.42	

p<.05

There was no significant difference noted in the relationship between children's adjustment to divorce and the number of siblings in the home. (See Table 4).

Although there was no significant difference shown

between children's adjustment and visitation by the non-custodial parent, there was a higher adjustment rating for those children seeing that parent at least once a month. Fifty-nine percent of those children who saw their non-custodial parent at least once a month were girls and 41% of those were boys. (See Table 4).

Table 4
Adjustment by Siblings in the Home and
by Visitation

	N	Mean \bar{x}	SD	t
Siblings in the home				.04
0 siblings	15	15.6	4.97	
1 or more siblings	22	15.55	4.30	
Visitation				0.75
at least once a month	17	16.18	4.41	
less than once a month	20	15.05	4.65	

p<.05

No significant relationship was indicated between children's adjustment and whether or not they received counseling before or after their parents' divorce.

However, as shown in Table 5 those who had family counseling prior to the divorce showed a higher adjustment score than those who did not receive counseling. Those who received counseling following the divorce showed slightly lower adjustment than those who did not have counseling. Among those who had counseling before or after the divorce elementary age girls scored higher on the adjustment scale. Among the population 63% were girls and 37% were boys. (See Table 5). The girls scores ranged from moderate to good adjustment. The boys scores ranged from poor to moderate adjustment as related to counseling.

There was no significant difference between children's adjustment and their perceptions of their parents' relationship. (See Table 5). However, those children who perceived that their parents cooperated with each other about the divorce showed adjustment scores ranging from moderate to good adjustment.

Table 5

Adjustment by Pre and Post Divorce Counseling and
by Perceptions of Cooperation

	N	Mean \bar{x}	SD	t
Counseling				
Before				0.65
yes	5	16.80	4.21	
no	32	15.38	4.59	
After				-1.00
yes	15	14.66	4.39	
no	22	16.18	4.59	
Perceptions of mother's cooperativeness with father				
				.78
yes	18	16.16	4.81	
no	19	15.00	4.27	
cooperativeness with mother				
				.97
yes	21	16.10	4.57	
no	15	14.60	4.50	

$p < .05$

There was no significant relationship shown between children's number of social friends and the

children's adjustment to divorce. The Pearson Product Moment Statistical Test was done on the relationship ($r=.18$). However, on the Pearson Product Moment Statistical Test the relationship between children's adjustment to divorce and the number of close friends was of low to moderate significance ($r=.41$).

On an analysis of variance test done on the relationship between children's adjustment and with whom they reside no significant relationship was found. However, those who reside with the father scored higher rates of adjustment. Of those who reside with the father, 60% were males, and 40% were females. Of the males, 67% were high school age, and 33% were elementary age. Of the females, 100% were high school age. (See Table 6.)

Table 6

ANOVA				
Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	F
mother	28	15.36	4.56	.28
father	5	17.0	3.81	
other	4	15.25	5.12	
$p<.05$				

The children were asked to check a range of

feelings regarding feelings about their parents' divorce. (See Table 7). The children checked a mixture of feelings experienced before, after, and during their parents' divorce. Feeling confused about their parents' divorce, received the highest response from the children; and feeling happy about their parents' divorce received the lowest response. The children responded most frequently to feelings of confusion, helplessness, anger, guilt, and hurt during their parents' divorce as compared to experiencing those feelings before or after the divorce. The children responded higher to feelings of happiness and to having no feelings before the divorce as compared to those same feelings being experienced during or after their parents' divorce.

The children's feelings after their parents' divorce ranged from moderate to high frequency of responses on confusion, helplessness, anger, happiness, guilt, hurt, and fine.

It appears that although the null hypotheses were accepted, the children's feelings about divorce are clearly present.

Table 7
Feelings about Divorce

Feelings about Divorce	Before	During	After
1. Confused	13	19	16
2. Helpless	3	9	8
3. Angry	5	14	13
4. Happy	9	0	4
5. Guilty	1	9	7
6. Hurt	9	18	14
7. Fine	9	4	13
8. Nothing	11	10	8
	1 was too young	1 was too young	

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Studies on the effects of divorce on children's adjustment have been numerous. Several of the previous studies had similar findings to my research findings. Although the null hypotheses of this study were accepted due to no significant differences on the statistical tests between children's adjustment and many variables, there were some differences indicated by highs and lows on the mean scores of each test.

The adjustment of boys to their parents' divorce according to this study is lower than among girls on age, sex, and grade variables. These results were similar to studies by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1979); and Guildubaldi and Perry (1985). According to the adjustment scale ratings elementary age boys had lower adjustment scores.

Children scored higher adjustment scores to parental divorce if they resided with their father, had visitation with the non-custodial parent at least once per month. These results were similar to a study by Kurdek and Berg (1987). Children in this study had higher adjustment scores to parental divorce if they had close friendships and if it had been more than two

years since the time of the divorce.

Children scored higher on adjustment to divorce of their parents if they had pre-divorce counseling, had less involvement with the court process, and if they perceived a cooperative relationship among parents.

Children responded to their personal feelings about their parents' divorce and selected a range of feelings. There was a higher response to feelings of confusion and a lower response to feeling happy. The feeling of guilt was responded to more frequently during and after the divorce.

Children in this study had higher adjustment scores if visitation with the non-custodial parent was at least once per month; if they perceived that their parents cooperated with each other, if they received pre-divorce counseling, and if they had low involvement with the court process of talking to the judge or their parents' attorneys.

If these areas were taken into consideration by the court system, there would be some room for modification of the traditional court system. A court system which would promote the well-being of the whole family by use of a helpful court process rather than

an adversarial court process might minimize the effects of divorce on children's adjustment. A court system which fosters family connectedness by resolution of disputed issues in a non-adversarial manner, might increase the non-custodial parent's involvement with the child; might increase cooperation between the parents regarding their children; and might encourage family counseling for the restructuring of the family.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited by the size of the sample. There was not a control group to compare with the group of children who had experienced their parents' divorce.

The questionnaire was not tested as to reliability and validity. Therefore, the results of the study are only applicable to this particular group of students for this study.

SUGGESTED RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research regarding children's adjustment to divorce, should include more studies on the adolescent population, particularly those in early adolescence. More research should be done on the implications of the court process on children's adjustment to the divorce of their parents.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The psychosocial adjustment of children to divorce is an important area of social work practice since the number of divorces increases each year. Children affected by divorce show various signs of the impact of divorce in their lives in school, in the community, and in the home. As these children become adults the scars of divorce will have healed or will linger. How social workers approach the family regarding divorce will have an impact on the healing process which occurs in the lives of the children.

The social work profession can help this healing process for children of divorce by looking at two approaches to intervention, prevention, and post-vention with divorced families.

First, the social worker in a school setting has the resources to develop programs in the school for children from divorced homes. This could be done by conducting divorce groups, teaching classes for children about divorce, or by developing a reading resource section for children of divorce. The school social worker has the knowledge to assist teachers and administrators in understanding the impact of divorce

on children and help them recognize changes in children who are dealing with their parents' divorce.

Finally, the social work profession has the responsibility to advocate for the welfare of the family. Divorce is a legal avenue by which a husband and wife ends their commitment to each other. It is also the avenue in which children are left to consider the commitment felt by parents toward them. The management of these considerations by children are critical to the adjustment of children to their parents' divorce.

Social workers must become knowledgeable about the laws and the court process regarding divorce because the laws and the court process impact the lives of children who are experiencing the divorce of their parents. With knowledge of the law and court process, the social worker has the opportunity to advocate for modification of the court process relating to matters of divorce. Such modifications might include an interdisciplinary approach by attorneys, judges, and social workers, to resolving disputes in a non-adversarial manner.

These two approaches to social work practice might permit the scars, which children experience from

disruption of the family, to heal.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

SEX

_____ (1) male

_____ (2) female

_____ AGE

_____ GRADE IN SCHOOL

_____ WHAT STATE WERE YOU LIVING IN
WHEN YOUR PARENTS GOT THEIR
DIVORCE?

DO YOU LIVE WITH YOUR

_____ (1) mother

_____ (2) father

_____ (3) other

_____ YEAR OF YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE

_____ NUMBER OF NATURAL BROTHERS

_____ older than you

_____ younger than you

_____ NUMBER OF NATURAL SISTERS

_____ older than you

_____ younger than you

_____ HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS LIVE WITH YOU?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE YOUR NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT?

- _____ (1) more than once a week
- _____ (2) once a week
- _____ (3) once every 2 weeks
- _____ (4) once a month
- _____ (5) less than once a month
- _____ (6) summers only

DID ANYONE COUNSEL WITH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS "TO BE DIVORCED"?

- _____ (1) yes
- _____ (2) no

WHO COUNSELED WITH YOU ON WHAT IT MEANS "TO BE DIVORCED"?

- _____ (1) an attorney
- _____ (2) counselor
- _____ (3) pastor
- _____ (4) friend or relative
- _____ (5) other

FOR THE MOST PART HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR PARENTS ARE FEELING ABOUT THE DIVORCE? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

MOTHER

- _____ (1) angry
- _____ (2) hurt
- _____ (3) hostile

FATHER

- _____ (1) angry
- _____ (2) hurt
- _____ (3) hostile

_____ (4) happy	_____ (4) happy
_____ (5) content	_____ (5) content
_____ (6) cooperative with father	_____ (6) cooperative with mother

DID YOU AND YOUR FAMILY (PARENTS AND CHILDREN) HAVE
FAMILY COUNSELING BEFORE YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE?

_____ (1) yes
_____ (2) no

HOW LONG BEFORE THE DIVORCE?

_____ (1) 0-3 months
_____ (2) 4-6 months
_____ (3) 7-12 months
_____ (4) more than one year

WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO DURING YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE?

_____ (1) talked with the judge
_____ (2) talked to either or both of my parents'
attorneys
_____ (3) nothing (stayed out of it)

HAVE YOU RECEIVED COUNSELING ABOUT THE DIVORCE SINCE
YOUR PARENTS WERE DIVORCED?

_____ (1) yes
_____ (2) no

FROM WHOM?

_____ (1) counselor

_____ (2) school social worker

_____ (3) other

HOW MANY FRIENDS DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU

_____ (1) confide in?

_____ (2) socialize with?

HOW DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING IN SCHOOL?

A. ATTENDANCE:

_____ (1) I like to come to school

_____ (2) I like school but can't come because of
family conflicts

_____ (3) I don't like to come, but I come anyway

_____ (4) I don't attend school regularly because I
don't like school

B. DISCIPLINE:

_____ (1) I try to follow rules and regulations at
school

_____ (2) I sometimes find it difficult to follow
all the rules and regulations

C. CLASSWORK:

SOME FEELINGS I HAVE ABOUT SCHOOL ARE (mark all
that apply)

_____ (1) difficult to concentrate

_____ (2) difficult to complete tasks

_____ (3) difficult to follow directions

_____ (4) difficult to keep up with assignments

_____ (5) easily distracted (talk to classmates,
pass notes, etc.)

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE HOW
WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR OVERALL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
_____ (1) good	_____ (1) good	_____ (1) good
_____ (2) satisfactory	_____ (2) satisfactory	_____ (2) satisfactory
_____ (3) poor	_____ (3) poor	_____ (3) poor

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE HOW
WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE DIVORCE?
(MARK THOSE APPLICABLE)

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
_____ (1) confused	_____ (1) confused	_____ (1) confused
_____ (2) helpless	_____ (2) helpless	_____ (2) helpless
_____ (3) angry	_____ (3) angry	_____ (3) angry
_____ (4) happy	_____ (4) happy	_____ (4) happy
_____ (5) guilty	_____ (5) guilty	_____ (5) guilty
_____ (6) hurt	_____ (6) hurt	_____ (6) hurt
_____ (7) fine	_____ (7) fine	_____ (7) fine
_____ (8) nothing	_____ (8) nothing	_____ (8) nothing

APPENDIX B

STUDENT RECORD

<u>ATTENDANCE</u>	<u>DISCIPLINE</u>	<u>GPA</u>
1987 _____ days absent	1987 _____ referrals	1987 _____ GPA
1988 _____ days absent	1988 _____ referrals	1988 _____ GPA
1989 _____ days absent	1989 _____ referrals	1989 _____ GPA

APPENDIX C
ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Area	Points
Number of friends to confide in	
0	0
1	1
more than 1	2
Number of friends to socialize with	
0	0
1-2	1
3-4	2
more than 4	3
Number who like school	
like to come to school	3
like to come but can't due to family conflicts	2
don't like school but come anyway	1
don't attend school, don't like	0
Discipline	
try to follow rules	1
difficulty following rules	0
Classwork	no problem problem
difficult to concentrate	1 0
difficult to complete tasks	1 0
difficult to keep up	1 0
difficult to follow directions	1 0
easily distracted	1 0
Performance in school after divorce	
good	2
satisfactory	1
poor	0
Feelings after divorce	
happy	1
fine	1
Attendance (1989-1990)	
less than 3 days	2
less than 6 days	1
6 or more days	0
Discipline referrals	
0	2
1-2	1
3-4	0
Grade point average	
3.0-4.0	2
2.0-2.99	1
0.0-1.99	0